

WYCOMBE WANDERERS

A great advertisement for the aims
and principles of sponsored football

by

STUART EARP

of the BUCKS. FREE PRESS

The year 1975 will go down as the most successful in the 90-year history of Wycombe Wanderers Football Club. But not only that, the last 12 months crowned a six-year period of unprecedented success for both the club and its manager Brian Lee.

Lee's record since he joined the club in 1969 speaks for itself. Four Isthmian League championships (two under the Rothmans sponsorship), once runners-up, Amateur Cup semi-finalists once and two money-spinning F.A. Cup runs into the bargain. The High Wycombe public, accustomed to success over the last few years, have responded by giving the Blues by far the biggest following in the league. Which other club can take three or four coach-loads of supporters to away matches with them?

BRIAN LEE MAKES CHANGES

When Lee came to Loakes Park he immediately made changes. The reserve team was axed and top-class players began to join his squad, players like John Delaney, Ted Powell and Peter Suddaby. By the end of his first term, he had the makings of a great side and finished runners-up by only one point to Enfield. That team, plus a few others, won the League and retained it the following year.

The 1972-73 season was something of a disappointment by Wycombe's own high standards - they finished fourth! Then Rothmans stepped in with the idea of sponsorship - an incentive that matched Lee's basic principles of the game completely. A total accent on skill, clean play and more goals was right up his street. The net result has been two successive Rothmans Isthmian League championships.

But the real secret behind Wycombe's success story is this. The manager will not tolerate cheating in any form. By that I mean professional fouls, time wasting - call it what you will. He has fostered a

genuine desire for attacking football and with total respect from his players, the honours have come flooding in.

Looking back on last season, the highlight for the club (if not the manager) was the F.A. Cup run. Four times in the last 90 years, Wycombe had reached the second round but progressed no further. This time they faced Third Division Bournemouth in round two at Loakes Park and included in the Bournemouth side was John Delaney - a former skipper of the Blues. A crowd of 8,000 watched the goalless draw. The replay at Dean

perhaps a little disappointing for Wycombe who, amazingly, had a couple of chances to win the game at the first attempt. A much relieved Jack Charlton spoke of 'murder' at Ayresome Park in the replay.

The 1,000 or so fans who made the trip to Middlesbrough witnessed probably the bravest display by a Wycombe team ever. Inside the massive stadium were 29,000 'Boro' fans but even they had to salute Wanderers after 90 pulsating minutes. Middlesbrough threw all they had at the amateurs and yet only got through with an 89th-minute winner by David Armstrong. The scenes at the end of the match, with the crowd chanting the name of Wycombe for a full five minutes, will long be remembered.

£12,000 CUP BONANZA!

As if the Cup success (and the £12,000 or so that went with it) wasn't enough, Wycombe turned their attentions to retaining their League title. At the time, they were 16 points behind the leaders, Enfield, in sixth place. Their chances looked slim. But with a run of 22 matches without defeat in the League, they eventually clung on to their championship by just one tenth of a goal from Enfield. In the end they needed to beat Dagenham on the last Saturday of the season and thanks to a goal by Keith Searle after 85 nerve-racking minutes, they made it.

Court the following Wednesday was a memorable occasion. A goal down in the first 10 minutes it looked all over for Wanderers but they snapped back to shake the football world and win 2-1. The prize for beating that second round hoodoo was Middlesbrough at home.

At the time, 'Boro' were second on goal average to Everton in Division One of the Football League. The prospect of a 'giant-killing' captured the imagination of thousands, especially the press and television. 10,000 packed into the ground to see the teams end all square at 0-0 -

Outstanding for Wycombe this season have been goalkeeper John Maskell, with 21 clean sheets, Keith Mead at centre back, Gary Hand at left back, Terry Reardon in midfield and Keith Searle up-front. Skipper Alan Phillips played better and better as the season went on, while the evergreen Tony Horseman topped the goalscoring charts for the umpteenth time with 33. 'Bodger' and Maskell have been with Brian Lee throughout the last six years.

On the disciplinary front, the Blues finished with just one booking - as they did last year. The two offences were shirt pulling and handball. Two years, two bookings - a remarkable record considering the pressures of playing at the top.

Talking of records, league clubs know how difficult it is to win at Loakes Park, the facts show that Wanderers haven't lost there in the last 51 league games! The last team to do it was Woking who won 2-1 on November 23rd, 1972. Since then Corinthian Casuals, Hayes, Enfield, Tooting, Walton, Sutton and Ilford and Dulwich twice have shared the points with perhaps Dulwich coming closest to breaking the run this season when they had a goal disallowed with the score at 1-1. Since the defeat by Woking only six clubs have won at Loakes Park in league, cup and friendly matches. The records are; Isthmian League: P 51, W 41, D 10, L 0, Goals for 128, Goals against 34. Total games: P 107, W 80, D 21, L 6, Goals for 392, Goals against 79.

Those records just about sum up Wycombe Wanderers' success over the last few seasons. For the club, manager